

BeezKnees

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for Varroa Treatments

A practical UK guide to protecting yourself when managing varroa mites

<https://beezknees.co.uk>

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Introduction

Managing varroa mites often involves handling substances that can irritate the skin, eyes, or airways if used incorrectly. While the focus of varroa management is usually on protecting bees, it is equally important to protect yourself.

This guide explains the role of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) when dealing with varroa treatments in the UK. It is intended to help beekeepers understand common risks and make informed decisions about personal safety.

Important: PPE requirements vary between products. Always follow the instructions and safety information on the product label.

Why PPE Matters in Beekeeping

Many varroa treatments are classed as **veterinary medicines**. Even products described as “natural” can still pose risks if they:

- Come into contact with skin or eyes
- Are inhaled as vapour or dust
- Are handled repeatedly without protection

Using appropriate PPE:

- Reduces the risk of short-term injury or irritation
- Helps prevent long-term health effects
- Encourages safe, consistent working practices

Typical Risks When Handling Varroa Treatments

Depending on the treatment type and method of application, potential risks may include:

- Skin irritation or absorption
- Eye irritation or splashes
- Breathing in vapours, aerosols, or dust
- Contaminating clothing or hands

Understanding these risks helps you choose sensible protection.

PPE Considerations by Treatment Type (Overview)

The table below gives general, descriptive guidance. It does not replace product instructions.

Treatment type	Typical risks	Common PPE considerations*
Organic acids (e.g. oxalic acid, formic acid)	Skin, eye and respiratory irritation	Gloves, eye protection; respiratory protection may be required depending on method
Thymol-based treatments	Skin and eye irritation	Gloves; avoid direct contact
Amitraz-based treatments	Skin absorption	Gloves; avoid prolonged skin contact
Pyrethroid-based treatments	Skin irritation	Gloves; wash hands after handling

**Always follow the product label and current UK guidance.*

Common Types of PPE Used by Beekeepers

Gloves

Disposable gloves (such as nitrile) are widely used when handling treatments.

Good practice includes:

- Using clean gloves for each task
- Avoiding reuse of disposable gloves
- Removing gloves before touching tools, phones, or vehicles

Eye Protection

Eye protection helps prevent splashes or accidental contact.

This may be particularly relevant when:

- Handling liquids
- Working at awkward angles
- Applying treatments in windy conditions

Respiratory Protection

Some treatments may release vapours, aerosols, or dust.

Key points:

- Respiratory protection may be recommended for certain products or methods
- Always check the product label for specific requirements
- Avoid treating in enclosed or poorly ventilated spaces

Protective Clothing

Long sleeves and dedicated beekeeping clothing can:

- Reduce skin exposure
- Prevent contamination of everyday clothes

Wash contaminated clothing separately from household laundry.

Environmental and Situational Factors

Even with PPE, working conditions matter.

Pay attention to:

- Wind direction and strength
- Temperature (which may affect vapours)
- Children, pets, or bystanders nearby
- Working in confined spaces (sheds, small apiaries)

If conditions are unsuitable, delay treatment where possible.

Hygiene and Aftercare

After handling varroa treatments:

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water
- Avoid touching your face until hands are clean
- Dispose of used PPE appropriately
- Clean any contaminated tools according to guidance

Good hygiene reduces accidental exposure long after the task is finished.

Storage and Disposal Safety

- Store treatments securely and out of reach of children
- Keep products in original containers with labels intact
- Dispose of empty packaging and used PPE according to local guidance
- Never reuse containers unless the label explicitly allows it

Key Safety Principles to Remember

- PPE supports safe use — it does not replace correct use
- Labels and instructions come first
- If unsure, stop and seek advice
- Safe habits protect both beekeeper and bees

Official Guidance and Further Reading

- National Bee Unit / BeeBase
<https://www.nationalbeeunit.com>
- Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD)
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/veterinary-medicines-directorate>
- British Beekeepers Association
<https://www.bbka.org.uk>
- BeezKnees – Varroa Management
<https://beezknees.co.uk/varroa-management>